

\$90 Vehicle Fee for Kananaskis – A Multi-million Dollar Cash Grab That Will Deter Visitors

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The *Globe and Mail's* Emma Graney reported earlier today that Alberta will impose a \$90 annual fee for vehicles entering Kananaskis Country. Since last year AWA has warned Albertans of Minister Nixon's intent to shift the financing of parks and protected areas onto user fees and away from general tax revenues. This announcement, coupled with the new public lands camping pass, is just further evidence of the UCP government's commitment to the user fee model for funding parks.

Despite the Minister's assertion that additional staff will be hired, AWA Conservation Director Ian Urquhart, believes this fee is a "cash grab that will deter Albertans from visiting Kananaskis and shift the visitation pressure to provincial parks outside of K-country that don't charge a vehicle entry fee."

Last year, AWA pointed out that Washington State offered an example of where vehicle permit fees deterred the public from visiting their parks. The State introduced its \$10 Discovery Pass in 2011. After the fee was introduced, statewide visitation fell by seven million visits per year from pre-Pass levels.

While vehicle passes to enter National Parks are well-accepted now, free admission to national parks in 2017 was credited with bringing 2.5 million more visitors into Canada's National Parks.

"The evidence suggests," said Urquhart, "that vehicle fees deter people from visiting parks. And, by not applying this bad idea to all provincial parks, the Kananaskis fee will likely shift visitation pressures to other parks in the region."

What the Minister suggests is a "modest" fee will be a multi-million dollar source of income for the government. Government traffic data reported that an average of 585 vehicles per day entered Kananaskis in 2020. Even if traffic volumes fall after this user fee is imposed, this new levy will generate millions of dollars for the Alberta Treasury.

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